



# Al-Risala 1985

April

## Editorial

Recent decades have seen a soaring of divorce rates in both the capitalist and communist blocks. In Britain, for instance, 147,763 divorces were granted in 1982 – the last year for which figures are available – compared with 54,036 in 1968. The latest figures represent a proportion of one in three marriages that end in divorce.

This high divorce rate can be attributed to the fact that, in western society, people have abrogated to themselves the privilege of absolute freedom. It is argued that they are entitled to live as permissively as animals. The permissive society that has evolved around this concept has destroyed the simple sanctity of family life and bred uncounted broken homes, for just as people feel free to enter into liaisons with whomsoever they will, they also feel free to break them off when feel so inclined.

The situation is even worse in the USSR, where the divorce rate is one of the highest in the world – approaching 50% of all marriages. The almost total control that the Soviet government exercises over the system of supply and distribution means that commodities are distributed through ration cards. The average adult in the Soviet Union spends 200 hours a year standing in queues. This is a chore usually performed by women, and Pravda lists it as a major factor in marital break-up. The seeds of distrust are sown when wives return home to find their husbands missing.

In this way natural family lives have been disrupted, in the case of communist societies by an unnatural system of distribution and supply, and in the case of western societies by an unnatural concept of man's role in the world. For man is not an animal like other animals: he is an animal with a conscience and an intellect, with responsibilities and loyalties. Islam seeks to rid human society of social ills such as broken homes by moulding every facet of man's life in accordance with nature – by making him aware of his responsibilities both to God and to his fellow-men first of whom come his own family.

2 April 1985

### A blessing, not a curse

According to Abu Huraira, someone said to the Prophet: "Curse the idolaters." "I have not been sent as a curse," the Prophet replied, "I have been sent as a blessing" (Hadith).

## Survival of the Fittest

Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) and W.G. Sumner (1840-1910) both were prolific publicists of social Darwinism. They applied the principle of biological evolution to the social sphere. Biological evolution had occurred through the unregulated competition of individual organisms and species for the scarce necessities of life. Unfit individuals and unadaptable species died or became extinct, leading to vigorous species and the eventual emergence of man. In just such a manner, reasoned the English sociologist Herbert Spencer, who coined the phrase "survival of the fittest", unregulated competition among men had led to social and economic progress and the rise of the most able to positions of power and eminence. For progress to continue, unregulated competition must continue. Those at the bottom of the social ladder were there because they were inferior or unfit to engage in social life. To aid them would retard their extinction, hence retard progress itself.

The doctrine of evolution was not an established doctrine from the academic point of view. In the 19th century, however, the exponents of this theory were accorded great popularity, especially in the U.S.A., as it justified the economic and cultural domination of western nations over their inferiors. Their claims of superiority were substantiated by the fact that, ostensibly, it was inherited by the law of nature. Nature itself had selected them to rule. That was a far cry from their deliberately exploiting others.

Philosophers like Herbert Spencer and W.G. Sumner exploited the situation. They provided the capitalists with the much needed support of philosophical arguments in their favour. Thus the concept of the survival of the fittest was extended to those who were at the helm of world affairs. They were nature's elite. To quote a passage from his book, *\*The Study of Sociology*:

\*William Graham Sumner quoted in Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought 1860-1915*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press 1945, p. 44.

I am Simply carrying out the views of Mr. Darwin their applications to the human race ... all (members of the race) being subject to the increasing difficulty of getting a living ... there is an average advance under the pressure, since only those who do advance under it eventually survive, and ... these must be the select of their generation.

Here is a similar quotation from Sumner\*:

The millionaires are a product of natural selection . . . It is because they are thus selected that wealth – both their own and that entrusted to them – aggregates under their hands . . . They may fairly be regarded as the naturally selected agents of society for certain works. They get high wages and live in luxury, but the bargain is a good one for society.

Many of the ideologies of modern times, like the theory of evolution owe their popularity less to their being truths than to the fact that they justify the desires of individuals, groups, countries and condone their pursuit on intellectual grounds.

All too often people accept or reject something not on the basis of truth or falsehood, but on the basis of what best serves their interests. With them it is expediency which counts, and not truth.

*\*Herbert Spencer, The Study of Sociology New York, D. Appleton & Co. 1891 p. 438*

4 April 1985

## Cutting Man to Size

The Government of India plans that the former Prime Minister's house shall be maintained as a museum so that people may come and pay their tributes to the memory of the most powerful woman in the world – who died a martyr.

The great irony of this death is that not all the power in this world was able to prevent it. At that moment of horrendous slaughter, one saw in Mrs. Gandhi, not a mighty leader at the pinnacle of international fame, but a poor, frail, helpless victim whom nothing and no one could save. It mattered naught that she lived in a splendid mansion, had amassed wealth, was possessed of unparalleled political power, was heavily guarded night and day, was looked up to by millions. She was shot dead by the very weapons which should have been used to save her life; and in the end, her lot was worse than of even the lowliest beggar or the poorest outcast of society.

From this we should learn the lesson of humility before God. No power on earth can keep us alive if it is God's will that we die. No power on earth can interpose between us and Our Maker on the day of judgment. No memorials erected by human beings will alter one whit our onward course towards heaven or hell. No human intercession will cause the slightest wavering in the judgment of our Divine Creator.

## A Return to Human Nature

On April 8, 1966, *Time* magazine asked on its cover: "Is God dead?" It was difficult to imagine such a revival of religious interests 20 years ago. Today God is not pronounced dead easily. Science and religion are not regarded as incompatible.

Campuses in the U.S.A. have seen a tremendous resurgence of religious interest. Students are seen wearing crosses; going to the Church is no more unfashionable. Not just students, but the academic community in general, is giving religion a second look "There is no doubt about it," says Harvey R. Cox, Victor S. Thomas Professor of Divinity at the Harvard Divinity School, "there is a tremendous resurgence of religious interests here."

Significantly, Cox's best selling 1965 book, *The Secular City*, suggested that people had lost interest in the sacred. His new Book, *Religion in the Secular City*, describes the current revival in religious concern.

People from all classes are flocking back to houses of worship and becoming true believers. What those intellectuals share is a revived interest in traditional religion and the question it raises and seeks to answer. A century that has seen the Gulag, the Holocaust, Hiroshima and the spread of nuclear arms has caused some who used to champion nationalism and science to humble themselves. Since their secular gods have failed, they are beginning to view more traditional gods with a new curiosity.

There is also evidence of a new interest in religion among the American population at large. Although Church membership dropped dramatically between 1958 and 1975, it has since leveled off and even begun to rise slightly. It is among the young and among intellectuals – two groups traditionally considered the most resistant to organized religion – that the change is most pronounced.

Among Jews, the change is even more pronounced. "There is a markedly different attitude toward religion now than there was when I came here 25 years ago." Says Rabbi Ben-Zion Gold, director of the Harvard Radcliffe Hillel. "Religion in general was on the defensive. But people lost confidence in progress, in the social engineering they thought would usher in the Golden Age. This punctured the self confidence of the academy's priests." Participation in weekly Hillel Services has increased sixfold during the last decade.

When I first started teaching here in 1966, the study of religion was viewed as intellectually sort of kooky," says Professor Cox. "Now there are very few people who would make a serious case that the teaching of religion does not belong at Harvard."

The 19th century view of religion as superstition makes little sense today," says Daniel Bell, Henry Ford 2nd Professor of Social Sciences at Harvard. "Science and religion are in two separate realms. There is no rational way of proving or disproving God's existence."

Our intellectual predecessors at the end of the 18th and upto the middle of the 19th century expected religion to disappear in the 20th century. The belief was based on the power of reason. The theory was that man could use his mind to overcome his problems, and religion would wither away. But that has hardly been the case. "We have gained enormous power over nature via technology," Bell said in an interview. "And yet, the 20th century is probably the most dreadful period in human history."

For intellectuals, according to Bell, there have always been secular alternatives to religious faith: rationalism and the belief in science; aestheticism and the belief in art; existentialism as expressed in the works of Kierkegaard and the early Sartre, and politics – the cults of Stalin, Lenin and Mao. Yet, one by one, those alternatives, particularly the political ones, have exhausted their power to move individuals.

And yet, certain advances in science today make scientist more, not less, interested in the question of religion. In 1981, the cosmologist Fred Hoyle wrote, "A common-sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super intellect has monkeyed with physics as well as chemistry and biology – there are no blind forces in nature."

It's ironic that my generation should be the one coming back to religion," says Alan Dershowitz, 45, professor of law at Harvard Law School. "We were the generation that had all the freedom and all the choice." And yet, it is the rootlessness of much of that freedom that has brought so many intellectuals back to religion.

The exhaustion of modernism, the aridity of communist life, the tedium of unrestrained self – all indicate that a long era is coming to a close," writes Bell. What will replace it, he and other suggest, will inevitably have something to do with the sacred.

"I cannot say to you I believe in God," says Coles, who might be described as a spiritual wanderer rather than as a believer in any particular faith. "There are moments when I do stop and pray to God. But if you ask me who that God is or what kind of image He has, my mind boggles. I'm confused, perplexed, confounded. But I refuse to let that confusion be the dominant force in my life."

We often come across features in western journals which deal with religion, whose revival marks a new phase in the modern world. Man had discarded religion in the 19th century by arguing that the human mind coupled with science was well-equipped to build up their lives.

After a long experiment, however, man's misplaced assumptions and unfulfilled expectations proved rather to be one of his great misconceptions. The human mind leads him nowhere but to scepticism. Science, at its peak, showed him the way to atomic annihilation.

The return to religion, by its very nature, signifies a return to human nature. It is indeed a healthy sign. The real matter of concern, however, is that this return at present amounts to a return to the distorted versions of revealed religion. Religion is essentially the voice of human nature. All revealed religions were initially capable of answering the call. But subsequent adulteration and interpolation over the ages have distorted their teachings altogether. It is Islam which is now the only true and authentic version of the



divine religion. In order to save man from yet another frustration, it is our bounden duty to make the scales fall from his eyes and to show him that the religion he has been seeking all along is actually Islam, the only true representation of religion. The most pressing task before us today is not only to acquaint modern man with Islam but to bring it to him in its original form.

7 April 1985

### Excelling in actions rather than words

Imam Abdul Rahman Auzaa'i (88-157AH) was a great scholar, but he used to remain silent most of the time. Once he said: "A true believer speaks little and acts much, while a hypocrite speaks much and acts little."

7 April 1985

### **It is one who knows how to maintain silence who is fit to speak**

This Is how Imam Auzaa'i's pupil, Abul Ibn-ul Walid ibn Mazid described his own teacher: "From looking at Imam Auzaa'i's books, one may gain the impression that he was a loquacious person; but I have never seen anyone who remained quiet more than him" (Abdur Rahman Auzaa'i by Sheikh Taha Al-Wall).

## Where to Work

In World War II, Germany and Japan formed a military alliance known as the Axis Powers. In 1940 their cry was: "Today Europe, tomorrow the world."

To achieve this aim of world conquest Germany and Japan waged war with the Allied Powers-Russia, Britain, America and France – for six long years. But war did not bring Germany and Japan the conquest they sought. Still, defeat in the Second World War taught them a lesson. It taught them to forget the idea of military conquest and concentrate on consolidating their industrial and economic strength. This change in method produced sensational results. Their quiet endeavour carried both countries to the top bracket of nations on the economic scale. Both countries – and specially Japan – have achieved economic hegemony in the world. The international market is bursting with Japanese goods. On February 5, 1982, the British weekly magazine *New Society* carried an article which described the phenomenon of Japanese post-war economic success. "They have fulfilled in peace the visions which took them to war 40 years ago."

Just as Germany and Japan learnt a lesson from their defeat in World War II, so the Muslims can learn a lesson from the post-war success of these defeated nations, the Muslims have, over the last 100 years, been struggling to achieve their ends by confronting their enemies in military and political areas. Incalculable loss of life and property has been incurred in these conflicts. Yet, despite all the sacrifices they have made, no good has come of all this for the Muslim themselves. It is time for the Muslim to take a fresh look at their recent history and change their approach. The Muslims, have resources which not even Germany and Japan – with all their scientific and technological capability – can rival they are bearers of true religion and the Qur'an – the authentic and preserved book of God. What they must do is give up the politics of agitation and militant confrontation; instead, they should concentrate on communicating Islam to other national of the world. There is no doubt that the Muslims strength lies in the strength of Islam alone. When they devote themselves to the task of communication of the faith, then they will surely find fulfillment of the visions they have cherished for so long.

The Muslims have been working in the wrong field; only if they change their area of action can their dreams come true. What they have been trying to achieve by war with other nations, they can only achieve by making peace with others and capitalizing on the spiritual wealth they have at their disposal.

## For God to Judge

Certain Quranic commentators have related a conversation involving Jews, Christians and Muslims, each of whom were of the opinion that they would enter paradise before everyone else. The Jews said that they were the followers of Moses, who besides being God's prophet, was also chosen to be spoken to by God. The Christians based their claim on their allegiance to Jesus, who was a personification of the spirit and wisdom of God. As for the Muslims, they argued that since their prophet Mohammad was the final prophet, they themselves – as his followers – were successors to the prophetic legacy; it was their privilege to continue the work of prophets: they were the best community that had been sent forth among mankind.

The judgment delivered on this matter by God, however, differs from the wishes of all these candidates for salvation. The Muslims are explicitly commanded to forsake such wishful thinking:

"It shall not be in accordance with your wishes, nor shall it be as the People of the Book wish. He that does evil shall be requited with evil: there shall be none to help or protect him. But the believers who do good works, whether men or women, shall enter the gardens of paradise. They shall not suffer the least injustice" (4: 123-124).

In one tradition the Prophet is reported as saying that true faith does not consist of fanciful thoughts or superficial pretences; true faith comes from the heart, and is verified by one's actions.

People of every religion have a tendency to hold their own religion to be superior to others. They then go on to believe that they themselves are superior to others in the sight of God, and will enter heaven solely on the basis of their religious denomination. But there are absolutely no grounds for this creed. No religion is inherently superior to any other. The only difference between Islam and other religions is that the former is preserved in its original form, whereas others are not. God will judge each person according to his or her own actions: only those who have done good deeds will be raised up in the sight of God. With Him "there are degrees for all", but "according to their deeds", not according to anything else (Qur'an 46:19).

## What is Success?

Men of fortune become subjects of envy to the people around them. They are considered fortunate for having succeeded in achieving worldly power and position. But do those who have managed to come to the top necessarily feel that this is so? Possibly not. Wealth is not all that man needs. It can at best serve the needs of the body, leaving the soul to starve. The feeling of something missing disturbs one. They feel as helpless as a common man does. Faced with an inner vacancy, a yawning gap in the soul that has to be filled, one turns to something or the other for a sense of plenitude.

This fact is borne out by the news-item which appeared in *The Times of India* of January 1, 1985. In spite of all the luxuries at his command Mr. Ford, the owner of the famous Ford Motor Company in the U.S.A. felt something missing in his life. His soul was not at rest, it was hankering after something else. In this state, when he was introduced to the Hare Krishna movement, he felt attracted to it as it seemed to answer and satisfy the cravings of his soul. He joined the movement. Afterwards he married a Hindu girl, Sharmila Battacharya (39) who was associated with the movement. The marriage ceremony took place in one of its centres in Australia. On this occasion, a photograph was published in the newspapers where he was seen in seamless clothes. Here is a part of the interview he gave to the AP correspondent:

"I am not a car. I'm a spiritual soul, just like anyone else." he said. "I'm only a Ford by name." he further added.

No amount of wealth and fortune can supply the needs of the human, soul. Material things do not become part of One's being. Soul therefore, can not rest in things beneath Itself. That is why, amidst plenty, one is plagued by loneliness. One is always seeking for something which can compensate this loss, which can fill the inner vacancy, which can become a part of one's being. Often man is unable to understand this, and goes sadly astray. The only true answer to this quest for a sense of spiritual fulfillment can be found in turning to God, the Lord and Creator of everything.

To know the pains of power, we must go to those who have it; to know its pleasures, we must go to those who are seeking it. —Charles Caleb Colton

## Longer Life Cut Short

When Gayelord Hauser (1885-1984) came to the US from Germany in 1911, he soon developed tuberculosis of the hip. Conventional medicine and several operations failed to cure him, so he turned to natural, herbal remedies. He was told to take warm baths, herbal teas, and a diet of salads, fruit juices and vegetable soup. Within a few weeks he was cured.

He then devoted his life to promotion of herbal medicine. He opened an office in Chicago in 1923, but soon moved to Hollywood where he counted many film-stars and celebrities, including Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich and the Duchess of Windsor among his disciples. His books, including *"Look Younger, Live Longer"* and *"Harmonized Food Selection with the famous Hauser Body-building system"* were widely read throughout America and Europe, and were translated into more than 40 languages.

Hauser once said that he would like to live until he was 100 years old, and then return to earth as a psychiatrist. "I have spent this life being concerned with the garbage people eat," he said. "The next time I will concentrate on getting rid of garbage thoughts."

Yet Hauser, who had spent his life showing people how to "look younger, live longer" died, at the age of 89, on Wednesday, December 26, 1984, of complication from pneumonia. His efforts to look younger were not able to ward off old age and infirmity; the measures that he took to live longer were no protection from death. He died before he could reach his coveted 100-year mark.

People in this world achieve every form of success. Their names become known far and wide. But still no man is satisfied. Everyone wishes to add some new feather to his cap. Sometimes his ambitions in this world are so far-reaching that they cannot even be fulfilled in a life-span of 100 years; another life on earth is required for their realization.

This is because man directs all his attention towards his temporary life on earth; he wants all his ambition to find fulfillment here. But the return to this world that he hopes for can never come to pass. Instead he will be raised up in an eternal world of infinite opportunities where no desire will go unfulfilled. But those who have worked only for the world will find themselves bereft when they arrive there. They will find themselves in a world which they had not anticipated or made any preparations for. They will have left the world in which they sought fulfillment of their ambitions far behind.

How sad that man is oblivious to the place where his desires can be fulfilled, and has set his heart on a world where he is doomed to disappointment.

## Do Millions Lead to God

A 63 year-old Italian born American living on the outskirts of New York remained unemployed for eight years, although he was a skilled carpenter, he remained unemployed for eight years and had to make out an existence on a modest union pension. He had not even enough resources to reap the tomato crop in the land he owned next to his house.

One day he decided to buy a lottery ticket. To his surprise, on 27 July, 1984, the news of his having bagged the first prize of twenty million dollars was broken to him, – the biggest lottery prize ever received by any single person anywhere in the world.

The news was first announced over the television. Immediately afterwards a press conference was called. Talking to newsmen, the carpenter told them that he was astonished to hear the news. He said, "I kept on checking my number with the one that was being announced." Even then he could not quite believe that it was he who had won the prize. His first reaction after hearing the news was to rush to his wife who was asleep. He said to her, "I think we are millionaires." While talking to newsmen he said, "I got whatever I need. I got my house. I got my tomatoes."

In this world, money suffices for all the material needs of the people. It, therefore, makes them think of it as an end in itself; possession of wealth comes to be regarded as everything. But, in the next world, it is not money which will matter but God's grace.

The problems that one faces in this life are very different from those which will have to be faced in the life to come. Today, wealth is held to be of paramount importance. But in the next life, it is good deeds alone which will count. Today, there is nothing we cannot obtain in return for money. But, tomorrow, the only way our needs will be satisfied will be by the grace of God.

(From a news item which appeared in the *New Straits Times*. Kuala Lumpur on the 28th July. 1984.



## Why this Exception?

A French acquaintance of mine, a M. Gilles Guilbert, by taste, nature and profession a musician, used often to assert, (to our amusement) regardless of where he was, that the only true criterion of the culture and civilization of a people was the standard of its love for music.

Somehow, he heard a Muslim Qari reciting the Holy Qur'an one day, and was at once enchanted by it. It was music to him, and so powerful that wherever he went he wanted to hear the Qur'an recited. When in Paris, he used to go on Fridays to the Turkish mosque. And he was so much more impressed when he was told that it was not a poem but prose. He began meditating: poems in each and every language are melodious, and could be measured and scanned, but nowhere could this be done with prose. Why an exception in Arabic? Then he learned Arabic script, and began reading the Qur'an himself. He bought a pocket size copy of the sacred text, and carried it with him always. He even began learning the smaller Suras by heart. At last, he decided to take the plunge and became Abdullah Guilbert.

I met him for the first time in Istanbul, some twenty years ago, and there he explained to me his theory or discovery, viz., poems can be scanned and measured with mathematical precision in any language, but not prose works, be that a classical or modern language; the only exception in Arabic; and in Arabic, only the Qur'an. So the Qur'an cannot be of human origin: surely it is the revealed word of God himself, for its verses can be scanned like the syllables of a poetical hemistich, so much so that even if a single letter of a verse of the Qur'an is omitted, it can be detected immediately on "hearing it."

I was impressed, but not being a musician myself, I was not much interested. One day he came to see me in the university, very nervous, agitated, perplexed and trembling. He said to me; "Surely our Muslim ancestors have somehow lost some passages of the Qur'an." Then he explained; "In the Sura 110 (Al-Nasr) they read and write 'afwaajaa Fasabbih' and that is, musically speaking, impossible." My humble knowledge of tajweed (psalmody of the Qur'an) came to my help, and I said; "No, that is not the only right way of reading it. One may also pronounce it 'afwaajan fassabih'. The sound of letter N in 'afwaajan' may then be pronounced in full as 'afwaajan' instead of 'afwaaj'. This may then be followed by the second word, 'fassabbih'."

Thereupon, he recovered as if from a trance, and said. "Oh, if that is so, then it is all right, nothing is lacking and I can renew my faith."

Article curtsy: Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah

## Belief in the Prophet

A crucial mistake brought defeat upon the Muslims in the Battle of Uhud. When the tide of battle turned against them, most of the army dispersed but the Prophet Mohammad, may peace be upon him, clung determinedly to his position. Fifteen people, following his example, remained firm in the barrage of arrows and swords that was descending upon them. At this time one of the idolaters, an Abdullah Ibn Qumayya, threw a stone at the prophet. Mas'ab Ibn Umair, a companion of the Prophet, moved to counter this attack. In the dual that ensued Mas'ab Ibn Umair was slain. Abdullah Ibn Qumayya thought that he had killed the Prophet himself, and returned to his army shouting: "Mohammad has been slain; Mohammad has been slain."

This news had a shattering effect on all the Muslims, even those who had forsaken their positions. Abdullah Ibn Abbas has given a lengthy account of the course of events, which has been recorded in *Bukhari*. Here is part of his account:

"Some hypocrites said: 'If Mohammad has been killed then you might as well revert to your former religion.' But Anis Ibn Nadhr said: 'If Mohammad has been killed, his Lord has not.'"

(Tafseer Mazhari).

According to another account, related by Ibn Kathir, one of the Ansar said: "If Mohammad has been killed then he has communicated his message; now is the time to fight for your faith." The following verse of the Quran was revealed with regard to this incident:

"Mohammad is no more than an apostle: other apostles' have passed away before him. If he die or be slain, will you recant? He that recants will do no harm to God. But God will reward the thankful" (3:144).

Some people just know the Prophet Mohammad in his capacity as a conqueror. Others know him in his capacity as a preacher of the faith – one who called mankind to God. The true believer is one who knows him in his latter capacity, for it is historians, not believers, who know him as a conqueror and nothing else.

## The Message of the Qur'an

In the name of Allah, the most beneficent, the most merciful

### Chapter II (Contd.)

Do you then hope that they will believe in what you say, when some of them have already heard the Word of God and knowingly perverted it, though they understood its meaning? When they meet the faithful they declare: "We, too, are believers." But when alone they say to each other: 'Must you preach to them what God has revealed to you? They will only dispute with you about it in the Lord's presence. Have you no sense?' Do they not know that God has knowledge of all they hide and all that they reveal? (2: 75-77)

One of the reasons for the promptness with which the people of Medina recognized the Prophet Mohammad, and believed in him, was that they had often heard from their Jewish neighbours of the coming of a final prophet. News of the final prophet had already been broken to them; they had been expecting his arrival. The Jews, then were responsible for the Muslims' initial fervour for Islam. It was only natural that the Muslims, in their turn, should hope that the Jews would unhesitatingly accept the prophethood of Mohammad. With every hope of a positive response, it was the sublimest of emotion that they called on the Jews to join them in their belief in the prophet of Islam.

How shocked the Muslims were, then, when they found that, contrary to their expectations, the Jews were not ready to accept their invitation to Islam. Rather, their efforts had the opposite of the intended effect, for the Prophet's opponents took the opportunity to ask the Muslims: "How are you so sure about the prophethood of Mohammad? If he were truly a prophet, the Jews would have been the first to believe in him, for their knowledge of what is written in the scriptures is greater than yours."

But acceptance of such a matter is not dependent upon knowledge alone; one has also to be sincere about it. As for the Jews" they had already altered their own Scriptures, though they knew them to be the word of God. They found loopholes in any part of the Holy Scriptures that did not conform to their wishes; they altered the Word of God. They found loopholes in any part of the Holy Scriptures at will; religion was subordinated to their worldly interests. People who act in this manner are not sincere, and it is only the sincere who can bring themselves to accept truth when it lies beyond the confines of their own group.

However true something may be, if one is bent on denial then one is sure to find some justification for it. Such a perverted attitude finally leads to actual falsification of the true word of God. One who has such an irreverent attitude towards the divine Scriptures can never appreciate the gravity of matters concerning God: he hears the word of God, but excuses himself from being bound by it; he believes in

God, but remains insensitive to his responsibilities to Him, committing acts of flagrant rebellion against Him which no one who really believes that God is watching over him, and hearing what he says, would ever dare to perpetrate.

“There are illiterate men among them who, ignorant of the Scriptures, know of nothing except lies and vague fancies. Woe to those that write the Scriptures with their own hands and then declare: This is from God,’ in order to gain some paltry end. Woeful shall be their fate, because of what their hands have written, because of that which they have gained.’ They declare: ‘The fire shall never touch us – except for a few days.’ Say: ‘Did God make you such a promise – or do you assert about Him what you have no means of knowing? Truly, those that commit evil and become engrossed in sin are the heirs of Hell; in it they shall remain for ever. But those that have faith and do good works are the heirs of Paradise; for ever they shall abide in it” (2:78-82).

The Arabic word for “vague fancies” is “Amani”. According to Ibn Abbas, Fara and Mujahid – among the most reliable of Quranic commentators – the word refers to those mythical tales, invented by Jewish scholars, which were designed to be as outwardly attractive as possible for popular effect. The overall aim of these stories was to prove that the fire of hell was for others – not for Jews. Added to this, statements in support of the theory that the Jews were God’s “chosen people” were attributed to venerated Jewish saints. It was made out that certain magical properties were inherent in their religion, ensuring salvation by virtue of mere adherence to the run-of-the-mill rites of Judaism.

Such recipes for cheap salvation are very attractive to the masses, for they give credence to the popular notion that there is no need to discipline oneself – no need to lead a responsible life; superstitious charms and magical remedies are enough to cure one’s spiritual ills and get one into heaven. The scholars who taught these tales became highly regarded; for the theories they expounded were designed to win popular support. Facilitation of eternal salvation became for them a lucrative source of worldly income. People flocked to their support. They were showered with offering, for they ushered others along the path to a paradise that did not have to be earned; in return they received worldly wealth that they did not have to labour for.

This has always been a failing in people who want to live in a dream world, who think that they have no obligations save the performance of certain perfunctory rituals, who delude themselves into believing that they have certain inalienable rights before God. Such people cannot accept the call of true religion, for truth demolishes all their wishful thinking, and makes them face the stark realities of life.

## No two ways about preaching

What makes the task of preaching unadulterated religion so exacting? It is because people are loath to accept the proclamation of true, unadulterated religion. Having built an edifice of national pride on the basis of religion, they cannot abide the message of pure humility and total submission to the will of God that true religion conveys. They view it as a challenge to their worldly honour and status. This is more than they can bear; therefore, they turn hostile to it and exert all their might to thwart its progress. But God did not allow the making of concessions in order to make the message acceptable to them:

“Follow then the right path as you are bidden, together with those who have repented with you, and do not transgress. He is aware of what you do.

And put no trust in the wrong doers, lest you get touched by the fire. You have no protectors besides Allah. Then you will not be helped (11: 112-13).

“They sought to entice you from Our revelations, hoping that you might invent something else in Our name, and thus become their trusted friend. Indeed had We not strengthened your faith you might have made some compromise with them, and thus tasted a punishment in this life and in the next. Then you should have found none to protect you (from Our wrath)” (17:75).

The hardest job is, indeed, to preach an unadulterated version of religion, whereas preaching a religion which seeks compromise and takes into account the worldly interests of the people is the simplest thing to do.

## The Cost of Contradicting Nature

Among the commandments given to the Jews in Biblical times was that they should keep holy the Sabbath day. Like every other activity, fishing was also prohibited on that day. When fish started to come up to the surface of the water on the Sabbath, some people could not resist the urge to catch them. It was a small minority of people who actually broke the law of God in this way, but a greater number of people committed another crime: they tacitly condoned the action of the minority by remaining silent, and not discouraging them from their defiance of God's law. These people were also made to share in the punishment meted out to those who had actually fished on the Sabbath day (Qur'an 7: 163-166).

Thus God showed that it is not only those who contradict His law who suffer as a result. Those who permit contradiction of His law by their silence are also made to share in the dire consequences.

The permissive society which has developed, especially in western countries, in recent times, allows blatant contradiction of the law of God and nature to go unchecked. Individual freedom is put above all other considerations. The priority given to the right of every person to fulfill his or her desires – wherever they may lie – has led to many unnatural and immoral acts becoming acceptable in the permissive society. In many places, for instance, homosexuality has been legalized and prostitution decriminalized.

But man has had to pay a heavy price for the total freedom he has allocated to himself. The emergence – over the last four years – of a new epidemic called AIDS (Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome) has provided a fresh and cruel reminder of the fact that man may be master of his own will, but he is not master of nature. Nature reaps vengeance on those who use their own personal freewill to contradict its laws.

As its name implies, AIDS involves a breakdown of the body's resistance to disease. Lymph cancer, an unusual skin tumour called Kaposi's sarcoma, and a particularly lethal form of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, are among the illnesses that ensue. Death usually occurs within a few months of the disease becoming apparent.

When AIDS first reared its head four years ago, it was confined to male homosexuals and female prostitutes. The alarming rate at which the disease has spread in 1984, however, shows that it is now affecting others as well. A January 1985 report by the Royal College of Medicine, London, pointed out that nurses who attend to AIDS patients are particularly susceptible to the disease. At present there are thought to be 7000 victims of AIDS in the United States alone and 8000 worldwide. If the present rate of increase is maintained, the Royal College report stated, then by the year 1990 1 million people in the United Kingdom will have contracted the disease.

The AIDS epidemic is another example of unnatural behaviour by a small section of mankind having dire consequences, not only for those who are guilty of such behaviour, but for the whole society which condones it.

## Loophole Industry

In western developed countries it is not bribing which is resorted to in order to escape the clutches of the law. They have established a major industry for the purpose, called the loophole business.

A tourist who was on a visit to Washington recently, wondered at finding new office buildings coming up in the city, as he had learnt from the newspapers about president Reagan's announcement of a cut in numbers of office employees. So he inquired of an architect as to who were supposed to be renting those offices. He was told that the people who were engaged in the loophole industry required them. The tourist was doubly amazed. He had never heard of loophole industry, so he enquired again as to what it actually meant. "Don't you know," the architect replied, "Washington has the largest loophole industry in the world," in the course of conversation he learnt that whenever a law is passed in the country, it clashes with the interest of one group or the other. People then look for some legal loopholes to save themselves from the grip of the law. To meet the demands of these groups, hundreds and thousands of people have engaged themselves in finding loopholes in the law. A single such loophole can earn millions of dollars. It has thus developed into a big institution.

It is easy to find ways and means to escape from the punishment which human laws exact. But how is man going to face the situation in the next world, where neither wealth, resources nor loopholes will come to his rescue.

## The Prophet of Islam

### Part I Chapter V

#### Lessons of the Prophet's life

In the Qur'an, these words have been addressed to the faithful:

"You have a good example in God's Apostle for anyone who looks to God and the Last Day and remembers God always" (33:21).

It is clear from this verse that there is a perfect example for every human being in the life of the Prophet Mohammad; but at the same time only one who remembers God always, who has set his hopes on God and the hereafter, will learn from this example.

The example of the Prophet's life then, albeit complete in every respect, will not serve as an example for everyone. It will be so only for one who has discovered God in such depth that all his thoughts are concentrated on his Lord; one who has staked all his hopes and aspirations on God; one who lives in fear of the punishment of the Lord; one who cherishes the thought of eternal bliss, and yearns for it heart and soul.

Why has this been made a condition for benefiting from the good example of the Prophet's life? The reason is that one has to be sincere in one's search for truth if one is going to find it. If one "Looks to God and the Last Day", then one will be sincere with regard to them. Sincerity will enable one to see the life of the Prophet in true perspective, and draw the right lessons from it.

This point can be understood from one example. The following saying of the Prophet is related in Hadith:

"One killed in defence of his property is a martyr. One killed in defence of his life is a martyr. One killed in defence of his religion is a martyr. One killed in defence of his family is a martyr.

(Tirmidhi, Nasal, Abu Daud)

As is clear from the text, this Hadith is about being "killed", not about fighting as such. The Prophet did not mean that whenever there is a threat to one's property, life, religion or family, one should immediately resort to arms, even if one is slain as a result. What he meant was that if, on any of these grounds, a believer is slain, then his death is one of martyrdom. The Hadith, then, is not an incitement to fight; it is a promise of martyrdom to those who are slain.



One who is not sincere in his attitude to religion, however, who is more concerned with giving his own personal whims the stamp of prophetic sanction, will take the words of the Hadith and use them to justify his selfish quarrels and nationalistic conflicts. Islam, he will say, teaches one to stand up for one's rights like a man; it urges one to fight in defence of one's faith, one's life and property, one's family and relatives. If one is victorious, then one has achieved one's ends; and if one is defeated, then one is a martyr, and it is only a fortunate minority who attain the heights of martyrdom.

But one who fears God will look at the matter soberly. After intense mind-searching he will ask himself: if one is required to fight in defence of one's property, life, religion and family, then why are there cases in the Prophet's life of his not doing so? Why, in the face of manifest oppression, did the Prophet – on many occasions – adopt a passive attitude and exhort others to do the same?

The following incident, for instance, has been recorded by Ibn Hisham on the authority of Abu Uthman Al-Nahdi. When Suhaib decided to emigrate to Medina, the Quraish said to him: "You came to us in an abject and destitute state. You became rich while with us, until eventually you reached your present state of wealth. Do you think we will let you run away, and take everything with you? Well, we won't." Suhaib enquired, "will you let me go then?" They said that they would. So Suhaib gave them everything he had. When the Prophet heard about this he said: "Good for Suhaib! He has made a fine profit."

If the previously mentioned Hadith means – in an absolute sense – that one should fight and give one's life in defence of one's property under any conditions, then the Prophet should have condemned Suhaib's failure rather than felicitated him on his success.

In the year 6AH, the Prophet set out from Medina to visit the House of God in Mecca. At Hudaibiyya, the Quraish prevented him from proceeding further. Peace negotiations ensued. It was at this point that Abu Jandal Ibn Suhail arrived on the scene. Upon accepting Islam, he had been greatly persecuted by the Quraish. They had tied him in chains, but when he heard that the Prophet and his companies were in Hudaibiyya, he somehow managed to escape. With fetters on his feet and body stained in blood, he arrived in Hudaibiyya. His father, Suhail Ibn Amr, was at the head of the Quraish that day. When he saw his son in the Muslim camp, he demanded that he be returned. It went sorely against the grain for the Prophet and his companions to send Abu Jandal back to Mecca. But Suhail Ibn Amr said that if Abu Jandal were not given up, there would be no peace treaty between the two sides.

It was a dramatic moment indeed. There was Abu Jandal, blood-stained and in chains, pleading with the Muslims: "Are you going to send me back to the idolaters, even though I have accepted Islam? Don't you see how much they have tortured me?" Yet still the Prophet ordered that he be returned to Mecca. "Abu Jandal," he said, "be patient: God will grant you, and those persecuted along with you, release from your suffering."

If the previously mentioned Hadith enjoined on one to fight and he martyred under any conditions, then the Prophet would not have urged patient resignation on Abu Jandal; rather he would have told him to seek martyrdom; he and his companions would have fought at Abu Jandal's side.

During the same Hudaibiyya encounter, the Quraish told the Prophet that they would not let him enter Mecca that year. Accepting this, the Prophet returned to Medina, without insisting on visiting the House of God. This was an entirely religious affair; indeed, the Prophet had acted on divine inspiration in setting out for Mecca with his companions. Even so, he withdrew. If the previously mentioned Hadith had referred to fighting and being martyred in an absolute sense, then the Prophet would have insisted on visiting the House of God that year, whether he had succeeded in his purpose or had been martyred in the process.

Umar Ibn Yasir and his parents were slaves of the Bani Makhzum in Mecca when they accepted Islam. Their conversion was complete anathema to the Bani Makhzum. They would take the family out to the desert in the heat of noon and lay them down on the blazing sand, where they would savagely torture them. They even went so far as to murder Umar's mother. Relating this incident, this is what the Prophet's biographer, Ibn Hisham, writes:

"When the Prophet passed them by, from what I have heard, he would say to them: 'Be patient, family of Yasir heaven is your promised land.'"

If the Hadith mentioned above was meant in an absolute sense, then the Prophet's advice to Yasir would have been tantamount to instruction in cowardice. The Prophet would have never given such advice. Rather he would have urged Yasir to fight and be martyred. He himself would have taken up this holy cause, whether the result had been Yasir's release, or his own martyrdom.

The truth is that the example of the Prophet is open to more than one interpretation, and it may happen that the wrong – or right – interpretation is made. Only if one is sincere will one interpret the situation correctly, and this can only be achieved through the realism that comes from a fear of God.

When a sincere person considers these incidents in the Prophet's life, then questions such as those posed here are bound to crop up in his mind. He is not just seeking a meaning which will serve his ends; rather he is seeking to ascertain the exact nature of the example imparted by the Prophet. This approach keeps him from misinterpretation. He will look at the matter objectively, and God's grace will enable him to arrive at the heart of the matter. He will see that the secret lies in realizing one thing: that trifling losses must be endured for the sake of great gains.

The consideration that should be uppermost in a believer's mind is what serves the interests of Islam. Not his own personal interests. His preoccupation is with preaching the message of Islam. If there is a clash between personal and preaching interests, then preaching of the faith will come first. It was in the interest of his preaching mission that the Prophet advised patience in the situations mentioned above. The Prophet endured all kinds of personal, financial and domestic losses in his life, just to ensure the continuation of his efforts to spread the faith. He knew that the Muslims' success in this life and the next lay in their pressing on with missionary work.

When one has a purpose in life, that purpose assumes overriding importance. One will bear losses in life in order to achieve it. In the absence of such a purpose one becomes preoccupied with every trivial matter. Seeking to avoid small losses, one has to put up with even greater ones. The preacher of God's word is the most purposeful person in the world: he endures small losses in pursuit of his greater aim. He avoids clashing with others on any issue, for this would be detrimental to his missionary work. He only acts when forced to do so in self-defence, for this does not interfere with his greater goal.

After this introduction, let us look at some incidents of great moral significance, which occurred during the life of the Prophet Mohammad.

## The Prophet and His Companions

### Remaining united and not initiating hostilities

In the year 10AH the Prophet sent Khalid Ibn Walid to the Yemen. Khalid preached Islam there and soon the tribe of Banu Harith Ibn Ka'ab accepted Islam and returned with him to Medina. "How was it," the Prophet asked them, "that you were always victorious in wars you fought before becoming Muslims?" "We never sought to overcome anybody," they replied. "True," the Prophet agreed, "but you always came out on top when others fought against you." "The reason for this," they explained, "was that we always remained united. We were never divided, nor did we wrongfully initiate hostilities. "True," the Prophet replied (*Seerat Ibn Hisham*, Vol II, p. 93).

### God will deal with men on the Day of Resurrection as they have dealt with others in the world

The Prophet said: "Whoever protects the honour of his fellow-man will be protected by God from the fire of hell on the Day of Resurrection.

### Fearing God in one's dealings with men

The Prophet once saw Abu Masood Ansari beating his slave. "Be in no doubt, Abu Masood," he said, "God has more power over you than you have over this slave." Abu Masood was filled with trepidation when he heard the Prophet's words. "Messenger of God," he said, "I am freeing this slave for the sake of God." "If you had not acted thus," the Prophet told him, "the fire of hell would have enveloped you" (Abu Dawood).

### Meeting in good grace and speaking gently

Ibn Umar said that righteousness was something easy. It consisted of maintaining a gracious expression, and being gentle in one's speech.